

## About the Urdu Research Library Consortium (URLC)

### Mission

The Consortium was formed in April 1996 by the University of Chicago in conjunction with the South Asia Library Project of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) and several U.S. research libraries to acquire and make accessible the private Urdu collection of Mr. Abdus Samad Khan in Hyderabad, India. Initial expenses are being paid with funds from the sale of shares to member institutions. (A prospectus for the Consortium with a more detailed description of its program is available for viewing.)

### Program Description

A consortium is proposed by the University of Chicago in conjunction with the South Asia project of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation to acquire and make accessible the private Urdu collection of Mr. Abdus Samad Khan, named the Urdu Research Centre (URC), in Hyderabad, India. The consortium will be constituted this year and continue until the objectives of acquisition and access are accomplished. This is anticipated to require seven years.

The URC collection will be purchased and relocated in an existing library, preferably in Hyderabad, under an agreement of collaboration with an existing institution - either a not-for-profit trust or a government agency. (The decision on the collaborating institution will be made by the consortium.) Cataloging and microfilming will take place in India under the supervision of staff hired for the program in conjunction with the collaborating institution.

The consortium will request that the South Asia Microform Project at the Center for Research Libraries house the resulting film copies in the U.S. The paper collection will remain in India following completion of the consortium's program of preservation and access, along with a set of the microfilm produced. Ownership of the Hyderabad collection will be transferred from the consortium to the collaborating institution in India as microfilming is completed.

### The Collection

Mr. Samad Khan's library is widely considered one of the world's finest for early Urdu periodicals and printed books. As a collector of great acumen, Mr. Samad Khan has built the library with care and erudition over most of his adult life. Holdings are well rounded across all areas of Urdu publishing. Approximately 2,600 periodical titles (many in complete runs) and at least 26,500 monographs comprise the collection. Most imprints date from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and are unavailable at any U.S. library. Physical condition of the collection is very good, especially considering the age of the publications. While comparisons of collections are often invidious, I am convinced that this is one of the best collections of Urdu in South Asia. A random sample of titles in the Urdu section of *The National Bibliography of Indian Literature (NBIL)* shows that the

Urdu Research Centre holds half again as many *NBIL* titles as the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library in Patna. Now in his early 60s, Mr. Samad Khan wants to sell the collection. The price is set at \$50,000.

Serials are one of the special strengths of the Urdu Research Centre collection. Periodicals in the collection from the last century and the early part of this century are undoubtedly the best that any scholar with whom I have spoken has seen anywhere in the world. There are more than 60,000 issues of journals along with newspapers, such as extensive runs of the rare *Avadh Akhbar*, published by Naval Kishore Press in Lucknow, and *Sahifah*, the first newspaper published from Hyderabad in Urdu and Persian. Many little literary magazines are available. The journals, many uniquely found at the URC, cover virtually all areas of Urdu writing in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences.

Monographs in the URC also cover an enormous array of topics. While relatively small at 26,500 titles, the collection is extremely important. As examples:

- **History** -- more than 2,000 titles on such topics as the Qutb Shahi dynasty and the rule of the Nizams, including government gazettes, court records, and histories of official service; Muslims in India; and the partition of India;
- **Language and literature** -- approximately 12,000 titles on the development of the Urdu language; *tazkiras* (prose works on Urdu poets); studies in Urdu of traditional grammar and phonetics; and more than 2,500 volumes of Urdu poetry;
- **Religious texts and studies** -- more than 4,000 titles on all aspects of Islam, as well as Urdu publications on Hinduism, Christianity, and Jainism;
- **Biography and autobiography** -- approximately 2,000 titles on major and minor figures from South Asia and elsewhere in the world.

The value of this collection is richly attested to by scholars who have used the URC for their research. Some of those who have spoken in the most emphatic terms about the centrality of the library are Abid Raza Bedar, Gail Minault, Barbara Metcalf, and David Lelyveld.

## Benefits

Scholars will benefit enormously from publications made accessible by the consortium. Current library collections in the United States are, for several reasons, ill-equipped to provide scholars with early printed texts in the Urdu language. Because most library collections on South Asia in this country have been developed since World War II, the greatest strengths are in holdings of recent publications. Aside from recent work by the South Asia Microform Project, there has been little systematic effort to acquire early Urdu imprints. Additionally, in the past faculty and students exerted only slight demand for access to earlier printed texts. The need for access has changed dramatically, however, as the result of thirty-five years of federal funding for study of "critical languages". Urdu is one of those critical languages and one of the South Asian languages most used by U.S. scholars of the region.

Libraries in the consortium will realize several benefits:

- **Representation on the governing board** for the consortium. Members will have a voice in determining the shape of consortial activities and priorities for the program, including the priorities of topics selected for grant applications.
- **Privileged access** to the collection. Bibliographic records will be available on a web page along with tables of contents for journals in the collection. We anticipate installing a scanner to be used for delivering page images over the internet from Hyderabad to meet research needs of scholars.
- **Right to copies, at-cost**, of project microfilm. Non-members will pay a higher fee for duplication.
- **Remote storage** of paper copies in Hyderabad and microfilm with the South Asia Microform Project at the Center for Research Libraries will eliminate the need for space to store the materials at member institutions and remove potential loads on local inter-library loan departments.
- **Save preservation expenses** in the U.S. Some of the titles from the Hyderabad are available in member libraries. Because they are printed on highly acidic paper, these U.S. holdings would require preservation attention soon if the consortium were not in existence, providing a more economical alternative by microfilming in India.

## Implementation

The Urdu Research Library Consortium (URLC) will be formed of several institutions in the U.S., India, and elsewhere for the sole purpose of accomplishing the objectives of preservation and access mutually agreed upon.

The URLC's program will be inaugurated with the sale of shares to raise seed money for the program. One share will cost \$10,000 or its equivalent in foreign currency. Funds from the sale of shares (estimated to be \$60,000 - 80,000) will be used as payment for purchase of the collection, for packing and moving the library to the collaborating Indian institution for processing, and to prepare a short-title catalog of the holdings. Purchase of shares entails a commitment to join in collaborative efforts to raise the balance of funds required for the program. Approximately \$400,000 will need to be raised beyond the funds from sale of shares in the consortium to complete the total program of acquisition, preservation, and access.

## Timeline

A letter of intention to join the consortium should reach James Nye at the University of Chicago Library by April 30, 1996. The letter must specify the number of shares that will be purchased and the person who will represent the institution on the consortium's governing board.

The Urdu Research Library Consortium will be constituted when an adequate number of participants have declared their intention to join. The first meeting of the URLC will be conducted via a conference call in May.

The first proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities to support the

preservation and access work will be submitted by July 1, 1996

Payment for shares should reach the University of Chicago by July 15, 1996.

April 24, 1996

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